

# Ishanapura (Içānapura) as Capital of Suvarnabhumi

सुवर्णभूमि

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**Suvarṇabhūmi** (Sanskrit: सुवर्णभूमि) is a toponym, that appears in many ancient Indian literary sources and Buddhist texts such as the *Mahavamsa*, some stories of the Jataka tales,<sup>[3][4]</sup> the *Milinda Panha* and the *Ramayana*. Though its exact location is unknown and remains a matter of debate, Suvarṇabhūmi was an important port along trade routes that run through the Indian Ocean, setting sail from the wealthy ports in Basra, Ubullah and Siraf, through Muscat, Malabar, Ceylon, the Nicobars, Kedah and on through the Strait of Malacca to fabled Suvarṇabhūmi

*Suvarṇabhūmi* means 'golden land' or 'land of gold' and the ancient sources have associated it with one of a variety of places throughout the Southeast Asian region. It might also be the source of the Western concept of *Aurea Regio* in Claudius Ptolemy's *Trans-Gangetic India* or *India beyond the Ganges* and the Golden Chersonese of the Greek and Roman geographers and sailors. The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* refers to the Land of Gold, *Chryse*, and describes it as "an island in the ocean, the furthest extremity towards the east of the inhabited world, lying under the rising sun itself, called *Chryse*... Beyond this country... there lies a very great inland city called *Thina*" Dionysius Periegetes mentioned: "The island of *Chryse* (Gold), situated at the very rising of the Sun".

Or, as Priscian put it in his popular rendition of Periegetes: "if your ship... takes you to where the rising sun returns its warm light, then will be seen the Isle of Gold with its fertile soil." Avienius referred to the *Insula Aurea* (Golden Isle) located where "the Scythian seas give rise to the Dawn". Josephus speaks of the "Aurea Chersonesus", which he equates with the Biblical Ophir, whence the ships of Tyre and Israel brought back gold for the Temple of Jerusalem. The city of *Thina* was described by Ptolemy's *Geography* as the capital city of the country on the eastern shores of the Magnus Sinus (Gulf of Thailand).

The location of Suvarnabhumi has been the subject of much debate, both in scholarly and nationalistic agendas. It remains one of the most mythified and contentious toponyms in the history of Asia. Scholars have identified two regions as possible locations for the ancient Suvarnabhumi: Insular Southeast Asia or Southern India. In a study of the various literary sources for the location of Suvarṇabhūmi, Saw Mra Aung concluded that it was impossible to draw a decisive conclusion on this, and that only thorough scientific research would reveal which of several versions of Suvarṇabhūmi was the original.

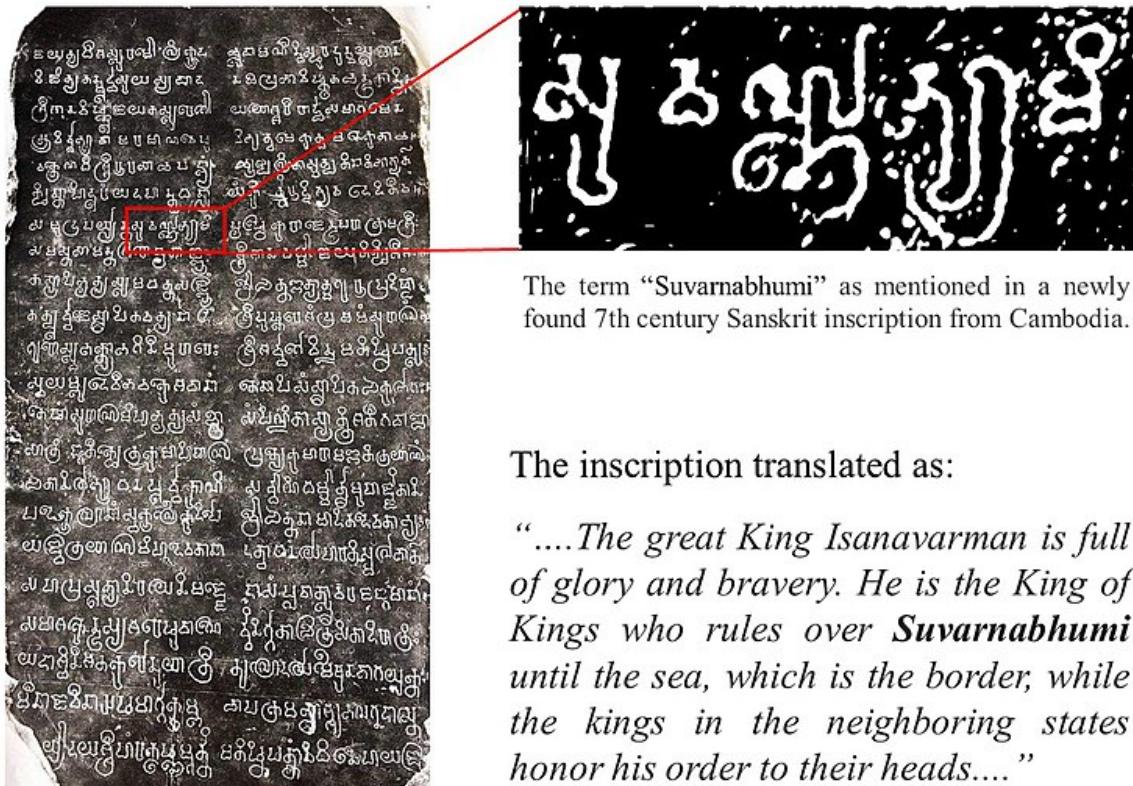
Some have speculated that this country refers to the Kingdom of Funan. The main port of Funan was *Cattigara Sinarum statio* (Kattigara the port of the Sinae).

Due to many factors, including the lack of historical evidence, the absence of scholarly consensus, various cultures in Southeast Asia identify Suwannaphum as an ancient kingdom there and claim ethnic and political descendants as its successors. As no such claim or legend existed prior to the translation and publication of the Edicts, scholars see these claims as based in nationalism or attempts to claim the title of first Buddhists in South-East Asia.

## Mainland Southeast Asia-Cambodia

Funan (1st–7th century) was the first kingdom in Cambodian history and it was also the first Indianized kingdom that prospered in Southeast Asia. Both Hinduism and Buddhism flourished in this kingdom. According to the Chinese records, two Buddhist monks from Funan, named Mandrasena and Sanghapala, took up residency in China in the 5th to 6th centuries, and translated several Buddhist sūtras from Sanskrit (or a Prakrit) into Chinese.

The oldest archaeological evidence of Indianized civilization in Southeast Asia comes from central Burma, central and southern Thailand, and the lower Mekong delta. These finds belong to the period of Funan Kingdom or Nokor Phnom, present day Cambodia and South Vietnam including part of Burma, Lao, and Thailand, which was the first political centre established in Southeast Asia. Taking into account the epigraphic and archaeological evidence, the Suvarnabhumi mentioned in the early texts must be identified with these areas.<sup>[20]</sup> Of these areas, only Funan had maritime links with India through its port at Oc Éo. Therefore although Suvarnabhumi in time became a generic name broadly applied to all the lands east of India, particularly Sumatra, its earliest application was probably to Funan. Furthermore, the Chinese name "Funan" for Cambodia, may be a transcription of the "Suvaṇṇa" of Suvaṇṇabhumi.



The rubbed text of the recently discovered inscription in Cambodia dated to 7<sup>th</sup> century.

The inscription translated as:

*....The great King Isanavarman is full of glory and bravery. He is the King of Kings who rules over **Suvarnabhumi** until the sea, while the kings in the neighboring states honor his order to their heads....”*

The oldest Southeast Asian inscription from Cambodia, dated to the 7th century, issued during the reign of King Isanavarman I, identifies *Suvarnabhumi* with the kingdom of Chenla (6th-9th century), the successor of Funan (1st-7th century).

On the discovery of a Pre-Angkorian stone inscription in the Province of Kampong Speu, Basedth District in December 2017, tentatively dated to 633 AD proved that Suvarnabhumi was the Khmer Empire. The inscription was issued during the reign of King Isanavarman I (616–637 AD) of the Cambodian Kingdom of Chenla, the successor of Funan and the predecessor of Khmer Empire. The inscription, translated, read:

“The great King Isanavarman is full of glory and bravery. He is the King of Kings, who rules over *Suvarnabhumi* until the sea, which is the border, while the kings in the neighbouring states honour his order to their heads”.

The Inscription is the oldest evidence ever found in Southeast Asia, mentioning Suvarnabhumi and identified it with Chenla. The inscription is now exhibits in the National Museum of Cambodia in Phnom Penh. However, his claim and the findings are yet to be peer-reviewed, and they are remained in doubt with other historians and archaeology experts across the region.

However the Chinese designated **Chenla** or **Zhenla** as Suvarnabhumi or it for the successor polity of the kingdom of Funan preceding the Khmer Empire that existed from around the late sixth to the early ninth century in Indochina. The name was still used in the 13th century by the Chinese envoy Zhou Daguan, author of *The Customs of Cambodia*. It appears on the Mao Kun map. However, modern historiography applies the name exclusively to the period from the late 6th to the early ninth century. Most modern historians assert that in this pre-ankorian period "Chenla" was in fact just a series of loose and temporary confederations of principalities. Following Hindu god king (devaraja) tradition the king chose the Sanskrit name of a patron deity or an avatar, followed by the suffix –varman, meaning 'protected by', obeying the code of conduct *Manusmṛti*, the *Laws of Manu* for the Kshatriya warrior caste.



"Chenla" or "Zhenla" was the name given in Chinese accounts of an entity that sent tributes to Chinese emperors. The word "Chenla" or "Zhenla" and likewise *Funan* are unknown in the Old Khmer language. Folk etymology attempts to link Chenla to a translation of its Chinese name as "Pure Beeswax", which was one of its regional commodities mentioned in Chinese annals. It has been suggested that the name means "Defeated Siam" as Zhenla has been reconstructed to *Tsienliäp* in Tang dynasty pronunciation, which is similar in sound to the Cambodian town Siem Reap whose name is often taken to mean "Flattened Siam".

However, it has been pointed out that this derivation is problematic as conflicts between Siam and Cambodia occurred centuries after the name was first used. Therefore, although the names Chenla and Siem Reap could perhaps be related, Michael Vickery argued that the original meanings of both names are unknown.

Similar explanation however may apply to a later variant form Zhanla; according to author Peter Harris: "It very likely means "Defeated Chams" since Zhan is the word in Chinese for Cham." He also noted the explanation given in *Mingshi*: "During the *qingyuan* reign period (1195–1200) of the Song Dynasty, Cambodia wiped out Champa and took over its land. Because of this, the country changed its name to Zhanla. But during the Yuan Dynasty it went on being called Chenla.

Chen La may have been known through several other names such as *Wen Dan* reconstructed as *Muntan*) or according to Tatsuo Hoshino Po-Lou, *Wen Dan* being its capital.

## Origins of Chenla

Most of the Chinese recordings on Chenla, including that of Chenla conquering Funan ("derived from very weak sources"), have been contested since the 1970s as they are generally based on single remarks in the Chinese annals. The History of the Chinese Sui dynasty contains entries of a state called Chenla, a vassal of the Kingdom of Funan, which had sent an embassy to China in 616 or 617, yet under its ruler, Citrasena Mahendravarman, conquered Funan after Chenla had gained independence.

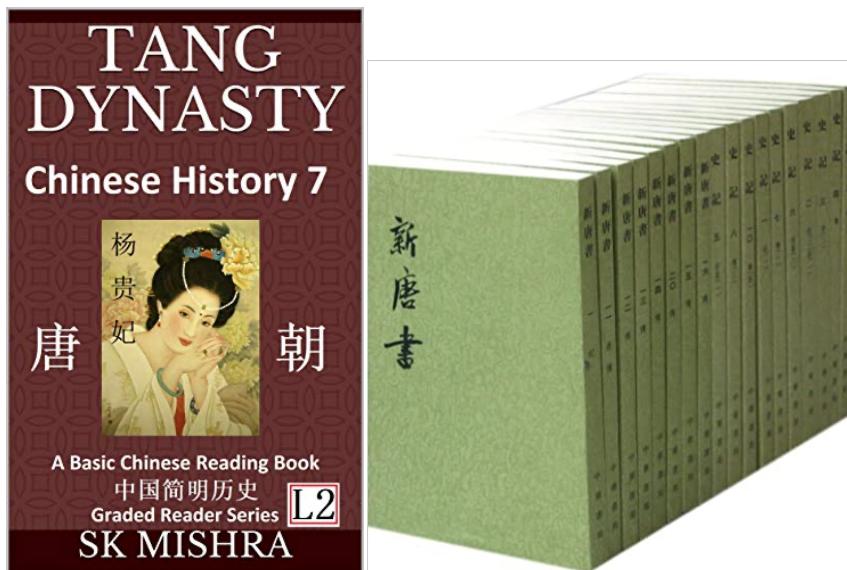
Like its predecessor Funan, Chenla occupied a strategic position where the maritime trade routes of the Indosphere and the East Asian cultural sphere converged, resulting in prolonged socio-economic and cultural influence and the adoption of the epigraphic system of the south Indian Pallava dynasty and Chalukya dynasty.

The origins of Chenla's aristocracy, whom author Michael Vickery called the "Dângrêk Chieftains", are obscure. These were local principalities north and south of the Dângrêk Mountains, who left behind the oldest known stone epigraphs in the region, bearing genealogical records that suggest increasing political dominance. The first known princes are mentioned in some early inscriptions. The Sanskrit inscription of Vâl Kantél, Stung Treng province names a ruler Vîravarman, who as his name suggests (his father's name was Sârvabhauma) had adopted the idea of divine kingship and deployed the concept of Harihara, a Hindu "god that embodied multiple conceptions of power". His successors continued this tradition, thus conveying the idea of a correlation between political and religious authority.

The *New Book of Tang*, generally translated as the "New History of the Tang" or "New Tang History", is a work of official history covering the Tang dynasty in ten volumes and 225 chapters. The work was compiled by a team of scholars of the Song dynasty, led by Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi. It was originally simply called the *Tangshu* (Book of Tang) until the 18th century. The *New Book of Tang* asserts that shortly after 706, the country was split into Land Chenla and Water Chenla. The names signify a northern and a southern half, which may conveniently be referred to as Upper (northern) and Lower (southern) Chenla. By the late 8th century Water Chenla had become dependent on the thalassocratic Shailendra dynasty on Java and the Srivijaya city-state on Sumatra. The last of Water Chenla's kings seems to have been killed and the polity incorporated into the Javanese monarchy around the year 790.

Land Chenla maintained its integrity under Jayavarman II, who proclaimed the Khmer Empire in 802.

Originally one of the regional centers of Funan with an unknown degree of sovereignty, Chenla was recognized by a foreign power as a separate political entity at the end of the sixth century, Bhavavarman I its independent ruler. Considerable scholarly discord prevails regarding the exact geographic origin, the extent, dynamic and chronology of territorial expansion and in particular, the religious and political center of Chenla and whether or not it consisted of a unified people under a single leader.

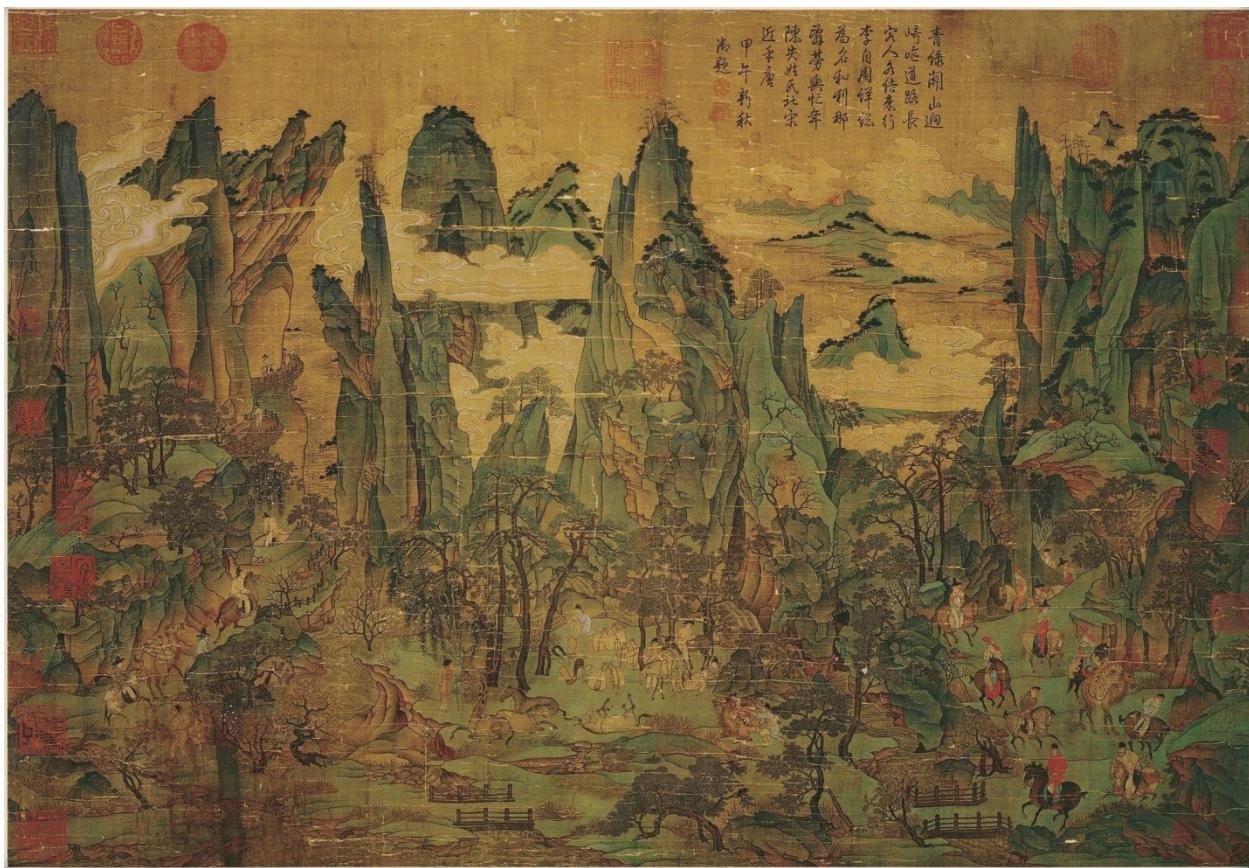


Late 20th century scholars "began cautiously to move away from the established historiographical framework" which had been laid out mainly by George Cœdès, who relies on external sources, specifically the Chinese annals, for its reconstruction. Michael Vickery suggests that ancient authors allocated the name "Chenla" to numerous small principalities and bundled them up as one singular entity in order to classify a larger number of people under the same characteristics, omitting distinctions between individual states. This approach explains why there was a noticeable increase in stone inscriptions during the seventh century. Multiple independent territories would produce their own recordings and written regulations, whereas in one polity only a tiny elite would be allowed access to such tasks.

Historiography reveals that it was king Isānavarman I who managed to absorb the ancient territories of Fúnán which led the *New Book of Tang* compiled by Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi in 1060 to attribute the effective conquest of the country to him. The earliest known date of the reign of Isānavarman, a date that must not have been long after his accession, is that of his first embassy to the court of Suí China in 616–17. This king is also known from his own inscriptions, one incised at Isānapura, dated 13 September 627 AD (K. 604), the other one at Khău Nôy (Thailand), dated 7 May 637 (K. 506).

Before historians had begun to analyse and use epigraphic sources in great numbers, all available evidence supported the idea that the center of the Chenla principality must be located at Mount

Phu Kao - Lingaparvata (the mountain of the linga) in Champasak Province, Laos once belonging to the Champa civilization. The local Vat Phou stele mentions the name of King Devanika (Fan Chen-ch'eng), king of kings - yet researchers do not relate the monarch to the *"Dangrek Chieftains"*. Contrary to the academic conclusions, Cambodian legend tells that "the origin of the kings of Cambodia goes back to the union of the hermit Kambu Svayambhuva, eponymic ancestor of the Kambujas, with the celestial nymph Mera, who was given to him by Siva." The king Srutavarman was born of this couple, who was followed by his son, king Sreshthavarman. This king gave his name to Sreshthapura - believed to be Vat Phou. At the end of the sixth century, Bhavavarman and Chitrasena (royal title: Mahendravarman) attacked Funan together and subdued it around 627–649.



One of the most famous of all Chinese landscape paintings, 'The Emperor Ming Huang Travelling in Shu'. Painted silk, a later copy of a Tang dynasty original of the 8th century CE. (Palace Museum, Taipei)

The obvious fact that Funan and Chenla are "vague concepts" that do not apply to a tribe, a nation or a people is at odds with the Cambodian legends of origin. Folklore follows an unflinching narrative like that of a single ruler such as King Devanika - the reconsecrated *maharajadhiraja* (king of kings) of Mount Phu Kao where "the people that lived in the region along with the people who came with Devanika, became the forerunners of the prosperous Khmer people".

### Water and Land Chenla

The Táng histories say that after the end of the reign period shénlóng) (i. e. after 6 February 707) Zhēnlà came to be divided in two realms, Lùzhēnlà) ("Land Chenla", also called Wèndān or Pólòu and Shuīzhēnlà ("Water Chenla") and returned to the anarchic state that had existed before it was unified under the kings of Fúnán and the first kings of Chenla. On the other hand, Water Chenla was associated with the Mekong Delta and had access to the river and its benefits, but this advantage had its downfalls as it made Water Chenla more susceptible to attacks

Late in the eighth century AD, it faced war from Javanese pirates that ultimately took over the Mekong Delta and then later the whole Chenla Empire ("Cambodia-History"). However author Michael Vickery asserts that these categories of Water and Land Chenla created by the Chinese are misleading and meaningless because the best evidence shows that until 802 AD, there was no single, great state in the land of ancient Cambodia, but a number of smaller ones.

### **Decline of Chenla**

The number of inscriptions declined sharply during the eighth century. However, some theorists, who have examined the Chinese transcripts, claim that Chenla started falling during the 700s as a result of both internal divisions and external attacks by the Shailendra dynasty of Java, who eventually took over and joined under the Angkor kingdom of Jayavarman II. According to the Sdok Kak Thom inscription (1053), Jayavarman II and his son Indrayudha defeated a Cham army in 790, then moved to north of the Tonle Sap, established the city of Hariharalaya, 15 kilometers south of Angkor.

Individually, historians reject a classical decline scenario, arguing there was no Chenla to begin with, rather a geographic region had been subject to prolonged periods of contested rule, with turbulent successions and an obvious incapability to establish a lasting centre of gravity. Historiography ends this era of nameless upheaval only in the year 802, when Jayavarman II established the appropriately named Khmer Empire.

According to George Coedès, Champasak was the origin of the ruling dynasty of Chenla and Vat Phou its spiritual center. Coedès and contemporary scholars refer to the historical annals of the Sui dynasty, which mention Chenla and identify its royal residence to be near a mountain named Ling-jia-bo-po or Lingaparvata, a temple was constructed on its summit. Vat Phou is an enormously impressive Khmer Hindu temple located at the base of Mount Phu Kao in Laos, which leads theorists to speculate that Phu Kao is the mountain that is referenced in the passage and that Wat Phou could be the temple mentioned; however this view is not accepted by modern scholarship.

### **Capital**



The top of Mount Phu Kao, Laos resembles a lingam

Authors Claude Jacques and Michael Vickery question the identification of Phu Kao as *Lingjiaobopo*/*Lingaparvata* because there are a number of hills in Cambodia that apply to the vague descriptions. Thus, the debate remains and the existence of Chenla as a unitary state or a capital at Vat Phou is questionable. Since there is not much evidence or writings from the time period, not much can be said about the region. The Chinese annals are one of the very few sources scholars can analyze and derive information from.

### Rulers

Traditionally leaders were chosen based on their merit in battle and their ability to attract a large following; however, as rulers gained more power moving away from the commoners horizon, a shift from measure of capability towards patrilineal descent occurred. Adoption of the idea of the Hindu state with its consecrated military leader, the "Varman"—protector king was the ideological basis for control and supremacy.

All essential elements of Bhavavarman's life and most of his descendants are known only through epigraphy. Interpreted as to be Vīravarman's successor and after gaining independence ("he has conquered his throne at the tip of his sword") ruler of the eastern portions of his father's realm, he "built a temple in 598 during his reign in [...] the center of the kingdom of Bhavapura". Mahendravarman is, according to epigraphy, also Vīravarman's son and attributed as to be the conqueror of Funan.

Succession is unclear, because "this at the same time eliminates his son Bhavavarman I of the royal function" Historian Michael Vickery resolves: "Bhavavarman and...Citrasena [Mahendravarman's given name] attacked Funan" [together]. Isanavarman is the founder of a new capital - Isanapura north of the Tonlé Sap (the archaeological site of Sambor Prei Kuk). His son Bhavavarman II - is mentioned only once in an inscription in the year 644. Jayavarman I is the last ruler of a united Chenla. He is the son and successor of the obscure Candravarman.

## **Religion**

During the reign of the Funan empire, the kings underwent a process of Indianization to consolidate and magnify their rule. Hindu religion was alluring as it offered the benefits of royal ideology with no political strings attached; thus hopeful Southeast Asian kings sought to incorporate it into their regime as a method to expand their power. The prominent Hindu Gods that rulers identified themselves with were Vishnu and Shiva, respectively known as the creator and destroyer of the universe.

A sculpture called Harihara, a combined form of Vishnu and Shiva, is also frequently depicted in religious establishments. This could portray that the early Cambodians believed that there is an equal balance between creation and destruction in the universe and that when one substance is terminated, another is produced to replace it. Other Hindu Gods Brahma and Indra along with deities such as Krishna Govardhana, Lakshmi, etc. were also worshipped. A epigraph from Siem Reap Province testified that during the late 8th century, it was evidently that Buddhists in Cambodia worshipped bodhisattvas.

Also originating from India, Buddhism, although not as preeminent as Hinduism, peacefully coexisted with Hinduism in Chenla; two schools of Buddhism were identified from a sculpture found that depicted twelve images of Buddha. This shows that the kings did not seem to enforce their religious views on their people and that influences of all kinds were creating a diverse community in Chenla. According to the Indian historian Himanchu Prabha Ray, Buddhism was an effective motivating factor in the expansion of maritime trading networks from India to eastern lands while Brahmanic Hinduism revolved more around an agrarian economy. This may be a contributing factor to why both Buddhism and Hinduism have managed to peacefully exist together as agriculture and trade combined create a great source of income and benefit the kingdom. Therefore, kings allowed both religions to flourish and reaped the advantages.

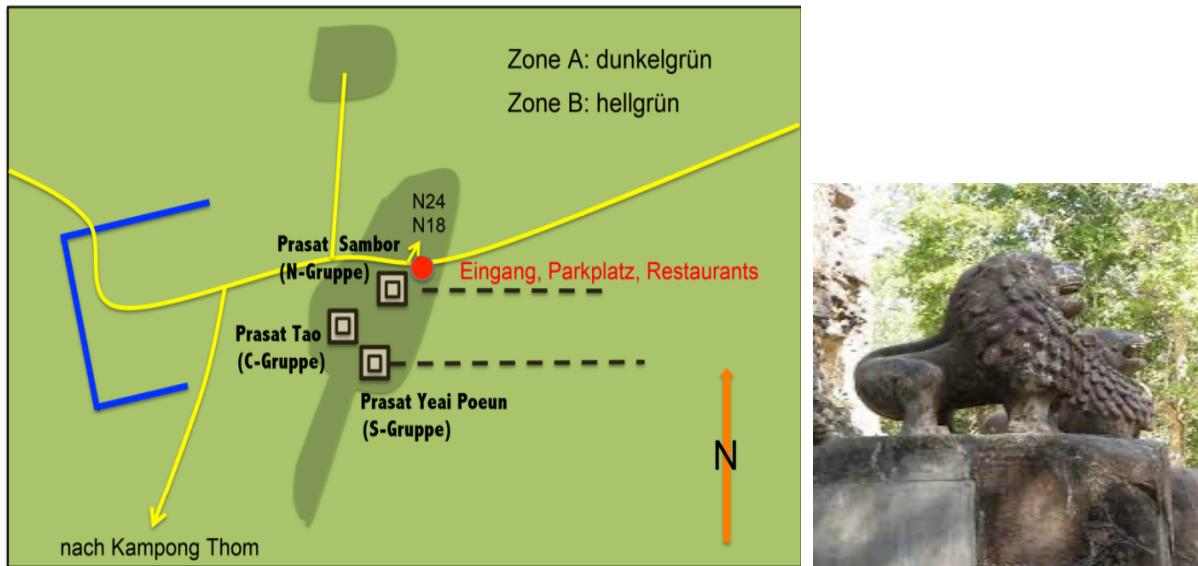
## **Religious structures**

By the close of the century [which?], the Chenla region was dotted with temples and shrines to the Hindu Gods. Many commoners were involved in the upkeep of these religious complexes and citizens of Chenla were expected to donate land, goods, and slaves to them. The great temple foundations consisted of their own holdings of land and people, functioning as powerful corporations; even minor temples had establishments and collected taxes.<sup>[38]</sup> While kings had established these temples as a means to increase their power, in reality, these structures might have been taking away valuable land and citizens from the empire; the taxes collected by the temples could have meant more wealth for the leader.

However, these structures may also be factor that stabilized the kingdom and allowed the king to expand and attract more civilians who followed Hindu beliefs as Hinduism served as a reason for people to follow the king's rule. Also, incorporation of these establishments could appeal to foreigners who would bring their trade, business, and goods to the area, making it more economically efficient.

## **Architecture**

## Sambor Prei Kuk (nicht massstabgetreu)



### Prasat Boram structure at Sambor Prei Kuk in the ancient capital of Isanapura

The design of the temples and shrines was greatly influenced by the prosperous Gupta state of northern and central India. The temple complexes were brick and stone based with a protruding statue representing a Hindu God or Buddha as the central focus of the building. Sandstone was the prominent material utilized for more important temples and was derived from the Kulen Mountains. Because of its heavy weight, it required a lot of manpower, which usually involved slaves.

Cremation burials lined with bricks were also discovered. These structures are supposed to be devoted to the veneration of members of the Brahmin caste since the burials had been carried out according to Hindu practice.

### Social hierarchy

Social status was determined based on one's knowledge of language, primarily Khmer or Sanskrit. Sanskrit was the language of the Gods, thus it was considered more valuable; the division between who worked the fields and who completed more worthy tasks was based on how well they knew Sanskrit. People who succeeded in educating themselves earned higher ranks such as being an official or even royal servant. However the majority of residents who lacked the ability to gain Sanskrit names spent their lives producing a surplus for the benefit of temples and ancestral Gods.

This depicts the impact Hinduism had on early Cambodian societies. Sanskrit, the language associated with Hinduism, was considered more valuable than the native Khmer language. This may show that the society before Indianization occurred in early South East Asia was unstable and that people latched onto teachings from foreigners because they had no permanent religious or social structures themselves.

Although a social hierarchy existed, there was no discrimination between genders. Women were not considered second class citizens rather many women played central roles in rituals,

specialized in crafts, and were given ranks as high officials. This may be because until recently, families followed matrilineal heritages instead of a patriarchal society, thus some aspects of the earlier society were retained.

### Slavery

Many commoners were assigned to serve as workers that cleaned, cooked, and built temples and shrines without any compensation. From analyzing ancient inscriptions, Judith Jacob has discovered that there were fourteen categories of slaves in Chenla distinguished by different origins and kinds of duties. These groups of people could be bought, sold, and given away, having no freedom to escape because their parents were in need of money or they had to pay off debts that they contracted or were passed on in their family. This suggests hereditary servitude; if your parent is a slave for a temple than you also have to serve at the same place, bearing no liberty of your own.

### Economy

The wealth of Chenla and its surrounding territories was derived from wet-rice agriculture and from the mobilization of manpower rather than from subsistence farming such as in the past. Productive lands were donated to temples where slaves worked the fields and helped the temples generate revenue. The kingdom sustained an extensive irrigation system which manufactured rice surpluses that formed the bulk of their trade. International trade is believed to have been essential to the kingdom. But by the time of early 7th century, Cambodian society was in an economic shift from trading orientation to more a agrarian focusing. Trading centers near the coast of Funan period were collapsing, while inland agrarian centers emerged.

In the remains of the main port, Oc Eo, (now in Vietnam) materials from Rome, Greece and Persia have been found, as well as artifacts from India and neighboring states. Indian influences might have been so alluring because Indian merchants who traded with early Cambodians had wealth and were prosperous, qualities to strive for, therefore there was little to no hesitation in adopting the religion of another culture.

**Íśānavarman** a king of the kingdom of Chenla in 7th century, which would later become the Khmer Empire. He was the son of, and successor to Mahendravarman. After Mahendravarman's death, Isanavarman took Isanapura as his capital. The Sambor Prei Kuk historical complex has been identified as Isanapura, the 7th century capital of Chenla.

The main temples at Sambor Prei Kuk are said to have been founded by King him.

The *Book of Sui*, compiled in 636, states that at the beginning of the 7th century, Zhēnlà was ruled by one Yīshēnàxiāndài (Íśānavarman). Inscription at Prasat Toc, Prasat Bayang, Vat Chakret, Kdei Ang Chumnik and Sambor Prei Kuk is attributed to the reign of Isanavarman I. The latest inscription attributed to him has been dated to 627 (549 Saka), while the only dated inscription attributed to his successor, Bhavavarman II, is of 639.

He is said to have had a sumptuous court at Ishanapura, with the king wearing a crown of gold with precious stones, pearl pendants, and attended by five great ministers. Inscriptions to his reign may be found at Kdei Ang (AD 667), Roban Romas, Kuk Prah Kot, Wat Chakret, and Wat Po. The claimed authority over Tamrapura, Cakrankapura, Amoghapura and Bhimapura. Besides the future King Bhavavarman II, a second son, Shividatta, was governor of Jyesthapura. An inscription dating from the reign of Isanavarman I, translated, reads: "The great King Isanavarman is full of glory and bravery. He is the King of Kings, who rules over Suvarnabhumi

until the sea [*Samudra-paryanta Suvarṇabhūmi*], which is the border, while the kings in the neighbouring states honour his order to their heads". Dr Vong Sotheara, of the Royal University of Phnom Penh, claimed that the inscription would "prove that Suvarṇabhūmi was the Khmer Empire."

### His Sons

1. Sivadatta
2. Isvarakumara
3. Yuvaraja (Crown Prince) – Name not identified from historical records

An incomplete inscription thought to be from the reign of King Isanavarman narrates, "The great King Īśānavarman is full of glory and bravery. He is the King of Kings, who rules over Suvarṇabhūmi until the sea [*Samudra-paryanta Suvarṇabhūmi*], which is the border, while the kings in the neighboring states honour his order to their heads." An incomplete Sanskrit inscription, found in the south gate of the Jami Masjid at Jaunpur, has traditionally been ascribed to the Maukhari king of Kanauj Īśvaravarman (first half of 6th century), which shows the connection of the Khmer kingdom with rulers at India during the same period.

After Īśānavarman, who ceased to reign around 637, the inscriptions tell us of a king named Bhavavarman (II). The only dated inscriptions we have from him, are that of Tà Kev (K. 79), dated 5 January 644 and of Poñā Hòr south of Tà Kev (K. 21), dated Wednesday, 25 March 655. Then seemingly follows a certain king Candravarman, known from the undated inscription K. 1142 of unknown origin who hailed from the family of Īśānavarman. The son of Candravarman was the famous king Jayavarman I whose earliest inscriptions are from Tûol Kôk Prâh, province Prei Vêi (K. 493) and from Bâsêt, province Bâttambâi (K. 447), both dated 14 June 657.

Some 19 or 20 inscriptions dating from his reign have been found in an area extending from Vat Phu'u in the north to the Gulf of Siam in the south. According to the *Xīn Táng shū* the kingdom of Zhēnlà had conquered different principalities in Northwestern Cambodia after the end of the Chinese era name *yōnghuī* (i. e. after 31 January 656), which previously (in 638/39) paid tribute to China. The reign of Jayavarman I lasted about thirty years and ended perhaps after 690. It seems that after the death of Jayavarman I (his last known inscription K. 561 is dated 681/82), turmoil came upon the kingdom and at the start of the 8th century, the kingdom broke up into many principalities.

The region of Angkor was ruled by his daughter, Queen Jayadevî who complained in her Western Bârày inscription K. 904, dated Wednesday, 5 April 713, of "bad times". The Táng histories tell us that after the end of the *shénlóng* era (after 6 February 707) Zhēnlà came to be divided in two realms, Lùzhēnlà ("Land Zhēnlà", also called Wèndān or Pólou and Shuīzhēnlà "Water Zhēnlà" and returned to the anarchic state that had existed before it was unified under the kings of Fúnán and the first kings of Zhēnlà.

Kings like Śrutavarman and Śreṣṭhavarman or Puṣkarākṣa are only attested very much later in Angkorian inscriptions; their historicity is doubtful. Land Zhēnlà sent an embassy to China in 717, aided Mai Thúc Loan's rebellion against the Chinese (722–723). Another embassy visiting China in 750 came probably from Water Zhēnlà. According to the Chinese Annals a son of the

king of Wèndān had visited Chinas in 753 and joined a Chinese army during a campaign against Nanzhao in the following year.

After the Wèndān embassy in the year 771 the heir-apparent Pómí came to the imperial court and, on 13 December 771, he received there the title "Kaifu Yitong Sansi"; pinyin: *Kāifǔ Yítóng Sānsī*), one of the highest honorific titles. In 799 an envoy from Wèndān called Lítóují received a Chinese title, too. As rulers of Śambhupura are attested by the inscription K. 124, dated 803/04 a king Indraloka and three successive queens, Nrpatendradevī, Jayendrabhā and Jyeṣṭhāryā. Two inscriptions refer to a ruler named Jayavarman: the first one, K. 103, hails from Práh Thāt Práh Srei south of Komponi Čām, dated 20 April 770, the second one from Lobō'k Srót in the vicinity of Kračēh near Śambhupura (K. 134), dated 781.

Cœdès called him Jayavarman Ibis, but probably he is identical with Jayavarman II, the founding father of the Angkorian kingdom, as Vickery has pointed out: "Not only was Jayavarman II from the South; more than any other known king, he had particularly close links with Vyādhapura. This place is recorded in only one pre-Angkor inscription, K. 109/655 [exactly: 10th February 656], but in 16 Angkor-period texts, the last dated 1069 [K. 449 from Pàlhàl, dated Sunday, 3rd May 1069] ... Two of them, K. 425/968 and K. 449/1069, are explicit records of Jayavarman II taking people from Vyādhapura to settle in Battambang."

### DIFFERENT RECORDS that CONFLICT

According to the inscription from Čăn Năk'ôn in Basăk/Laos (K. 363) Vīravarman was the father of Citrasena (royal title Mahendravarman) who was the younger brother of Bhavavarman. Obviously both princes had the same mother, but different fathers, which was corroborated by the Si Tep inscription (in present-day Thailand) giving the information that Bhavavarman was the son of a Prathivīndravarman and grandson of a Cakravartin whereas the inscription from Pak Mun in Ubon/Thailand informs us that the name of the father of Vīravarman was called Sārvabhauma.

All these inscriptions refer to a large territory ruled by these kings. It is recorded in the inscription from Robaï Romās at Īśānapura (the archaeological site of Sambor Prei Kuk) that a certain Narasiṁhagupta, who was vassal (*saṁāntanrpa*) of the successive kings Bhavavarman, Mahendravarman (the ruling name of Citrasena) and Īśānavarman erected on 13 April 598 during the reign of Bhavavarman a figure of Kalpavāsudeva (Vishnu).

This coincides with the oldest Chinese text that mentions Chenla, the *Suí shū* (Annals of the Suí Dynasty), compiled by Wèi Zhēng (580–643) in AD 636, which gives the information that at the beginning of the 7th century Chenla was ruled by Citrasena and Īśānavarman. The capital of the latter was Īśānapura,<sup>[74]</sup> while his predecessor Bhavavarman I still resided at Bhavapura, a place which probably is located in the vicinity of the modern town of Thala Barivat (13°33' N, 105°57' E). An inscription dating from the reign of Isanavarman I asserts that he was "the King of Kings, who rules over Suvarnabhumi as far as the sea" [*Samudra-paryanta Suvarṇabhūmi*], thus identifying Chenla with Suvarnabhumi.

### Monarchs' family tree

Order	King	Reign
1	Bhavavarman I	c. 550 – c. 598
2	Mahendravarman	c. 600 – 616
3	Isanavarman I	616 – 635
4	Bhavavarman II	before 639 – before 657
5	Candravarman?	?
6	Jayavarman I	c. 657 – 681
7	Queen Jayadevi	c. 681 – 713
8	Sambhuvarman	713 – 716
9	Pushkaraksha	716 – c. 730
10	Sambhuvarman	c. 730 – c. 760
11	Rajendravarman I	c. 760 – c. 780
12	Mahipativarman	c. 780 – c. 788

### Içānapura or Sambor Prei Kuk ---the site of an ancient city

**Was Suvarnabhumi Angkorean?**- Ak Yum, sometimes written Akyum or Ak Yom or called Prasat Ak Yum, is pronounced "Ok Yoom", the "O" of "Ok" is open, the "k" is nearly not audible. Its construction from the late 8th century, sometimes ascribed to the legendary founder of a united Khmer empire at the begin of the Angkor era, King Jayavarman II.

Ak Yum was a small artificial temple-mound in the centre of a pre-Angkor city now called Banteay Chheu. The name used for this pre-Angkor era is Chen-la (Zhenla), as this is the name mentioned in Chinese records for Cambodia's kingdoms, those of the 7th and 8th century in particular. Probably, this Banteay Chheu area then served as one of the successive capitals chosen by Jayavarman II. Even after the city of Angkor was established ten kilometres further east, at the Bakheng hill, Banteay Chheu remained to be an important settlement. But parts of it later on were covered by the reservoir West Baray, which was built in the 11th century.

Ak Yum is located at the base of the south dike of the West Baray, partly covered by it. The site was excavated in the 1930s under the direction of the French archaeologist George Trouv .

Inscriptions indicate that a temple dedicated to a “god of the depths” was previously located on the same spot. The first structure on the site was only a single-chamber brick sanctuary. According to excavations in the 1960s there must have been even a prehistoric site near the later Ak Yum temple.

There is not much to see at the present-day Ak Yum. The pyramid is not impressive any more, and its original appearance is hardly recognizable for non-scientists. But Ak Yum is historically remarkable as it was the first pyramid-temple in Khmers architecture. Originally the pyramid structure had a basis of about 100 metres square. Such an artificial mound with stepped levels, serving as a monumental pedestal for Prasat buildings, became one of the characteristics of the state temples in the Angkor era. Ak Yum can be regarded as their small prototype.

The best time to visit Ak Yum is the late morning, between 10.00 am and noon. You do not need a ticket, neither to visit the West Baray area nor for access to the Ak Yum ruins.

**Sambor Prei Kuk is the site of an ancient city called īçānapura**, which flourished as the capital of Chenla in the late 6th early 7th century. This capital was home to several Hindu temples that marked the start of a process of architectural evolution culminating in the spectacular architecture of the Khmer civilization, as exemplified in Angor Wat. During pre-Angkorian times before the foundation of Khmer Empire in the beginning of 9th century, religious places generally consisted of a single brick shrine, in contrast to the large and varied temple complexes that emerged later. However, current comprehensive field research in the archaeological site of Sambor Prei Kuk recorded a number of unknown brick structures and diverse temple layouts by composing several structures. Among these, three temple complexes stand out for their distinctive features: Prasat Sambor, Prasat Yeai Poeun, and Prasat Tao. These temple complexes consisted of square enclosures with a central shrine at the center and numerous other structures in the adjacent precinct, and were the prototype of the three different types of temple complexes in the Angkorian period. This article focuses on the layout of these three temple complexes to reveal the fundamental components and principle layout of temple complexes in the early stage of development and illustrate the progression to more complexities in temple construction in the later period. Based on the precise analysis of the dimensional layout of Prasat Sambor, along with findings from archeological surveys, it was revealed that this temple complex embodied the features of the pyramidal state-temples that served as the central religious facility of their respective periods.



**The paper of the author Ishanapura-Sambor Prei Kuk  
By Dr Uday Dokras**

**[https://www.academia.edu/60393762/Ishanapura\\_Sambor\\_Prei\\_Kuk](https://www.academia.edu/60393762/Ishanapura_Sambor_Prei_Kuk)**

*Ishvara* (Sanskrit: ईश्वर, Iśvara) is a concept in Hinduism, with a wide range of meanings that depend on the era and the school of Hinduism. Ishana is the short form of Ishvara. Therefore In ancient texts of Hindu philosophy, depending on the context, *Ishvara* can mean supreme Self, ruler, lord, king, queen or husband. In medieval era Hindu texts, depending on the school of Hinduism, *Ishvara* means God, Supreme Being, personal God, or special Self.

The hugely popular name is of Sanskrit origin and means 'possessing, rudras, lord, master, light, wealthy, reigning'. ... The name is given to the Lord Ganesha and Lord Vishnu. Ishan also refers to the eternal form of Lord Shiva. Ishana (Sanskrit: ईशान, IAST: Iśāna), is a deity in Indian mythology. He is often considered to be one of the forms of the Hindu god Shiva and is also often counted among the eleven Rudras. In Hinduism, some schools of Buddhism and Jainism he is the dikpala of the northeast direction. It is a Hindu name of Sanskrit origin and one of the names given to the deity Shiva (the Supreme Being within one of the major branches of Hinduism). Iśāna finds its roots in "Isha" which is the Sanskrit word for "lord, master" as in all powerful and all knowing. Ishaan is Sikh/Punjabi name and meaning of this name is "The Sun, One who Bestows Wealth".

Meaning of Ishan.

Name :

Ishan

Rashi :

Mesha

Nakshatra :

Krithika

Numerology :

6

Religion :

Hindu

What is the meaning of the name Ishan? The name Ishan is primarily a male name of Indian origin that means Son; Lord Of Wealth. East Indian/Sanskrit -From the Hindi element "ish," an invisible power that rules the universe. The name of a part of Shiva.

*Ishvara* is primarily an epithet of Lord Shiva. In Shaivism and for most of the Hindus, *Ishvara* is synonymous with Shiva. For many Vaishnavites, it is also synonymous with Vishnu. In traditional Bhakti movements, *Ishvara* is one or more deities of an individual's preference (*Iṣṭa-devatā*) from Hinduism's polytheistic canon of deities. In modern-day sectarian movements such as Arya Samaj and Brahmoism, *Ishvara* takes the form of a monotheistic God. In the Yoga school of Hinduism, it is any "personal deity" or "spiritual inspiration".

Varman or its variants, Varma, Verma, Varman, Burman or Barman, are surnames that are used in India & South-East Asia.

According to Avvai Su Duraisamy, it is derived from the Tamil word *Varamban* as in the royal titles "Vaana Varamban" (One whose kingdom bounds the sky) and *Imaya Varamban* (an epithet of the Chera king Nedum Cheralathan). According to Radhakanta Deb, the surname is derived from the Sanskrit word for "Shield, Defensive armour". Ishanavarman would mean- THE SHIELD OF SHIV and ISHANAPURA would mean the City of Shiva.

**An inscription dating from the reign of Isanavarman I claimed that he was, “the King of Kings, who rules over Suvarnabhumi”. Dr Vong Sotheara, of the Royal University of Phnom Penh, claimed that the inscription would “prove that Suvarnabhumi was the Khmer Empire.”**

The Hindu Temples Lost in the Forest now discovered in the interiors of the middle Mekong Valley -a part of the city of Ishanapura, identified with the ruins of Sambor Prei Kuk in central Cambodia, and listed as UNESCO World Heritage site on Saturday, the 8th July 2017 by the 41st world heritage committee, held at Krakow (Poland).

**Sambor Prei Kuk**, *Prasat Sâmbor Prei Kû* is an archaeological site in Cambodia located in Kampong Thom Province, 30 km (19 mi) north of Kampong Thom, the provincial capital, 176 km (109 mi) east of Angkor and 206 km (128 mi) north of Phnom Penh. The now ruined complex dates back to the Pre-Angkorian Chenla Kingdom (late 6th to 9th century), established by king Isanavarman I as central royal sanctuary and capital, known then as Isanapura. In 2017, Sambor Prei Kuk was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The archaeological site of Sambor Prei Kuk, “the temple in the richness of the forest” in the Khmer language, has been identified as Ishanapura, the capital of the Chenla Empire that flourished in the late 6th and early

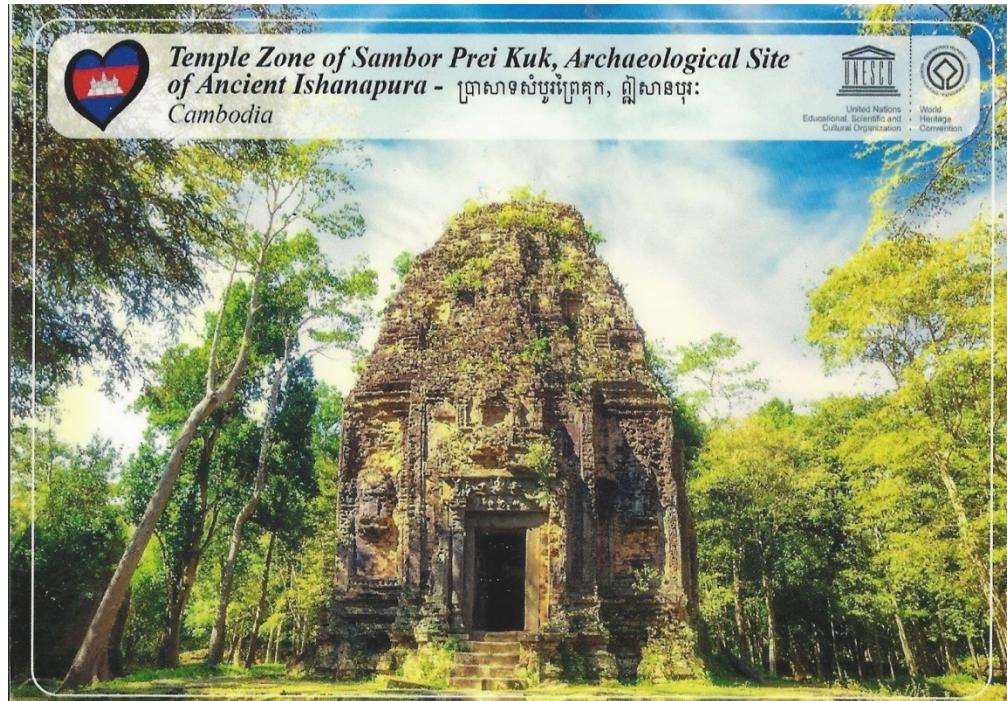
7th centuries AD. The property comprises more than a hundred temples, ten of which are octagonal, unique specimens of their genre in South-East Asia. Decorated sandstone elements in the site are characteristic of the pre-Angkor decorative idiom, known as the Sambor Prei Kuk Style. Some of these elements, including lintels, pediments and colonnades, are true masterpieces. The art and architecture developed here became models for other parts of the region and lay the ground for the unique Khmer style of the Angkor period.

**The official religion at Sambor Prei Kuk city was Shaivism**, one of the four most widely followed sects of Hinduism, which reveres the god Shiva as the Supreme Being and the Lingam (in Sanskrit लिङ्गं, lingam, meaning "mark", "sign", or "inference") or *Shiva linga* representing Shiva to be worshiped in temples as an erect penis. In Cambodia as it is in India, the lingam is a symbol of the energy and potential of god Shiva himself and this phallic symbol is often represented with the Yoni (Sanskrit: योनि yoni, literally "vagina" or "womb"), symbol of goddess Shakti, female creative energy.

Shaivism was the religion of Chenla (ca. 550 - ca. 800 AD), including elements of Hinduism, Buddhism and indigenous ancestor cults. In the Sambor Prei Kuk temples, it is possible to contemplate stone inscriptions in both Sanskrit and Khmer, naming both Hindu and local ancestral deities with Shiva and several altars with the lingam.

**Water fort:** The unique aquatic landscape of the site has Ishanapura functioning as a water-fort. The divine triad is formed by the

1. God Ishana (Shiva), his protégé
2. King Ishanavarman and his
3. city Ishanapura,



After explaining the Over hundred fascinating temples, still standing above the ground in various stages of preservation, on the either side of the O Kru Kae River, the unique Octagonal temples, the flying places carved on the walls of the temples, the architectural motifs such as the beautiful human figures in the ornamental windows (Kudu), the mythical crocodile (makara) the divinized time (Kala) and the beautiful Hamsa birds contribute to the uniqueness of the brick architecture of Ishanapura. Other interesting themes are-the cult of multiple Ishvara (Lord Shiva), the crafting of smile and seriousness on the faces of the Gods and the humans, using the cult of Hari-hara and Hari-Hara-linga as reconciliatory devices and the patronage to the Pashupata Shaiva sect. Durgasvami, an Indian Saka Brahmin, born in Dakshinapatha (Southern India) and settled in Ishanapura, resurcts through the pages of this monograph. The Brahmin married the daughter of King Ishanavarman, and as the royal son-in-law, he contributed to the development of Ishanapura, bringing Indo Saka-Scythian elements to the Khmer capital. Hindu Temples Lost in the Forest is a rare and profound book which describes the contours of Ishanapura as a knowledge seeking city, and as an influential diplomatic hub of Asia, interacting with China through diplomatic mission, with Indian through deep cultural discourse, and with Champa (Central Vietnam) through strategic matrimonial alliance. As the monograph convincingly shows, the rise of Ishanapura marked the passage of mainland Southeast Asia from the state of chiefdom to the status of statehood. This holistic study, presenting the temples of Ishanapura in an art-historical, socio-cultural perspective, is an indispensible companion to every one interested in unraveling the mystery behind the forests of Sambor Prei Kuk. Without listening to these temples, which carry their message in the shape of Sanskrit and or Khmer language inscriptions, the knowledge of both Khmer and Indian civilizations will remain incomplete and the dynamics of Asian civilization will continue to be nebulous.

Located on the Eastern bank of the Tonle Sap lake, close to the Steung Saen River, the central part of Sambor Prei Kuk is divided into three main groups. Each group has a square layout surrounded by a brick wall. The structures of the overall archaeological area were constructed at variable times: the southern and north groups (7th century) by Isanavarman I, who is considered a possible founder of the city and the central group (later date). The buildings of Sambor Prei Kuk are characteristic of the Pre-Angkorean period with a simple external plan. The principal material is brick, but sandstone is also used for certain structures. Architectural features include numerous prasats, octagonal towers, shiva lingams and yonis, ponds and reservoirs, and lion sculptures. Sambor Prei Kuk is located amidst mature sub-tropical forests with limited undergrowth. The area has been mined and could still contain unexploded ordnance.

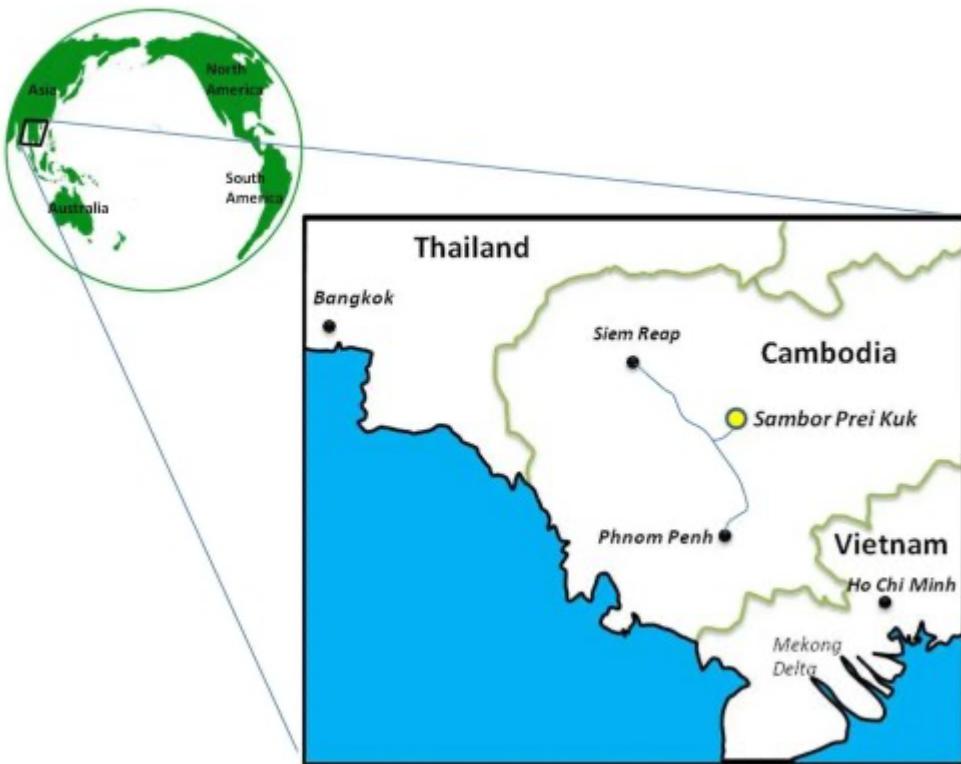


A temple in Sambor Prei Kuk

The whole compound is made of three clusters classified as group C for *Central*, N for *North* and S for *South* (Michon & Kalay, 2012). They are enclosed in a double-walled encircling 1,000 acre in which there were 150 Hindu temples today mostly in ruins.

1. **Group N:** Prasat Sambor is considered the main temple and it dates from the 7th century. It was dedicated to one of the reincarnations of Shiva known as *Gambhireshvara* (from Sanskrit गम्भीर - *gambhir*, profound, deep, solemn - and शिव, *shvara*, Shiva, Śiva, The Auspicious One).

2. **Group S:** Prasat Yeah Puon (ប្រាសាទយោបុរិ) includes 22 sanctuaries dated from the 7th century (600 - 635 AD) during the reign of Isanavarman I in dedication to Shiva.<sup>[7]</sup>
3. **Group C:** It is occupied by the Central Sanctuary or Prasat Boram (ប្រាសាទបុរាម) with lion sculptures that had inspired the popular name of *Prasat Tao* (The Lions' Temple). It is, however, the newest group dating the 9th century. The other main feature is the Tower of Ashram Issey, but there were also other constructions (18 temples) now in ruined (Palmer, 2011).



### 7th century

Isanavarman I reigned over the Chenla Kingdom between 616 and 637 AD, taking Isanabura as his capita and it is argued that he built the main temple Prasat Sambor (Group N), as there is an inscription on the site attributed to his reign and dated 13 September 627 AD. The king is also known for sending his first embassy to the court of the Sui Dynasty in China (616-617).

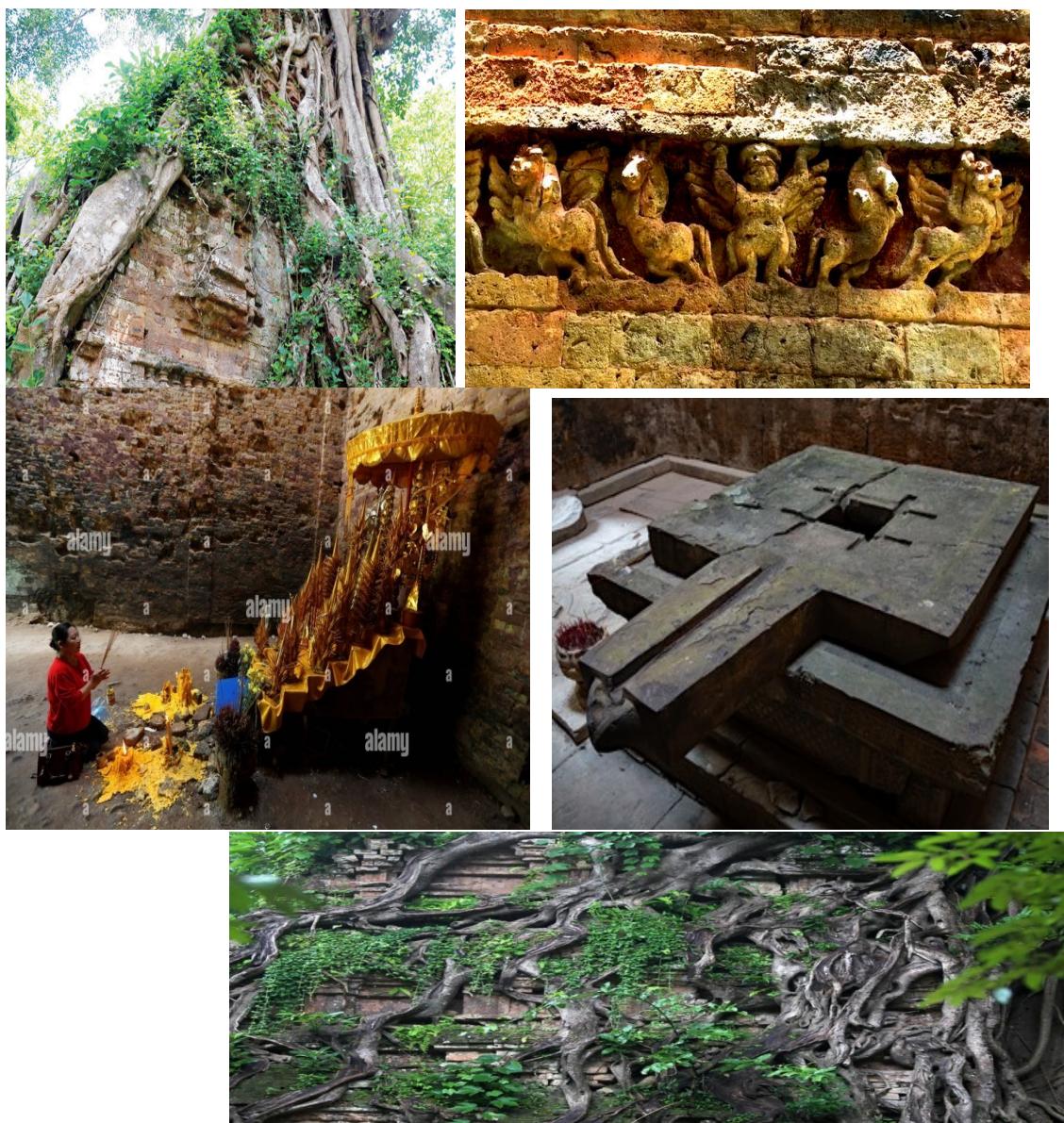
Chenla conquered different principalities in the Northwest of Cambodia after the end of the Chinese reign period *yōnghuī* (i. e. after 31 January 656), which previously (in 638/39) paid tribute to China. An inscription dating from the reign of Isanarvarman I claimed that he was, “the King of Kings, who rules over Suvarnabhumi”. Dr Vong Sotheara, of the Royal University of Phnom Penh, claimed that the inscription would “prove that Suvarnabhumi was the Khmer Empire.”

The last important king in Isanapura was Jayavarman I, whose death caused turmoil to the kingdom at the start of the 8th century, breaking it in many principalities and opening the way to

a new time: Angkor. This site is also claimed as an early capital of Jayavarman II (O'Reilly & Jacques, 1990).

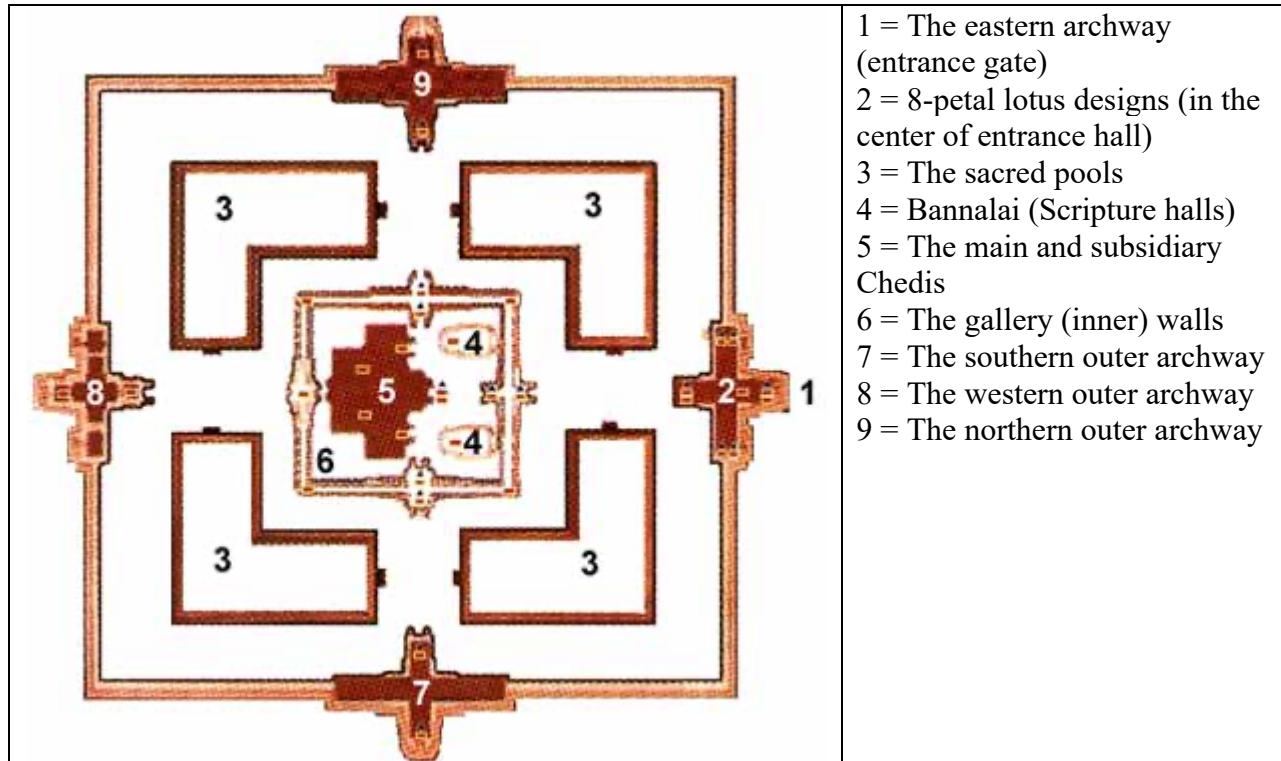
## 20th century

After the Lon Nol's coup d'état to Prince Norodom Sihanouk in 1970, US President Richard Nixon ordered a secret bombing of Cambodia to fight the Khmer Rouge guerrillas and any influence of North Vietnam in the country. The US aircraft bombed positions inside the archaeological site, causing craters near the temples, while the guerrillas left several mines on the land that were cleared only in 2008.



**Prasat Sambor as a Prototype of the Pyramidal State-Temple in Khmer Temple Construction**

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**Prasat Muang Tam** 'lowland castle' is a Khmer Hindu Temple in Prakhon Chai District, Buriram Province, Thailand. It is primarily in the Khleang and Baphuon styles, which dates its primary phases of construction to the late-10th and early-11th centuries. The primary deity was Shiva, although Vishnu was also worshipped there.

Like most Hindu temples, Muang Tam is oriented towards the east. It has a flat concentric plan, with a central sanctuary and two surrounded successively by an inner enclosure, ponds, and an outer enclosure. The ponds between the enclosures are an unusual feature of the temple, as is the central sanctuary, which is not elevated and has its towers arranged in rows of three and two. All the towers except the central one have been restored.

Kala are particularly prominent in the lintels of the temple. They are the best available aid in dating the structure, but the mix of styles (Khleang and Baphuon) makes accurate dating impossible. Several of the lintels on the outer gopuras are unfinished.

A small probably contemporaneous with the temple, lay to the east, while a later, larger baray survives further north between Muang Tam and Phanom Rung.

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